DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 398 545 CS 012 563

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TITLE Improving the Reading Skills of At-Risk Students.
PUB DATE 30 Apr 96
NOTE 70p.; M.A. Project, Saint Xavier University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Masters Theses (042) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Grade 2; Grade 6; *High Risk Students; *Instructional Improvement; Intermediate Grades; Parent Participation; Primary Education; Reading Aloud to Others; *Reading Instruction; Reading Motivation; *Reading Skills; Student Development; *Student Improvement; Writing Assignments
IDENTIFIERS Paired Reading; Trade Books

ABSTRACT

A study examined a program for increasing reading ability to reduce the academic failure of identified at-risk students. Subjects were 14 second-grade and 18 sixth-grade students in a middle class suburb, southwest of a large metropolitan area. Evidence for the existence of this problem was gathered from teacher observations, assessments, standardized tests, and surveys. Literature suggested that probable causes for the problem included: socioeconomic factors resulting in a lack of parental attention, inadequate student motivation, and frequent curricular changes that were not supported by staff development. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of four areas of intervention: (1) a parental involvement program; (2) integrating trade books and basal readers into the curriculum; (3) development of task group activities incorporating the use of cooperative strategies, partnered reading, and teacher read alouds; and (4) writing extension activities. Results of the intervention indicated an improvement in reading comprehension, both silent and oral. Findings revealed that volunteering to read orally was increased, attentiveness was lengthened and, consequently, reading for enjoyment was significantly improved. (Contains 10 tables of data and 23 references; various forms, including bibliographies, parent letters, interest inventory, reading diagnosis checklist, etc. labelled A through L, are appended.) (CR)

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ED 398 545

IMPROVING THE READING SKILLS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of Master's of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight

Field-Based Master's Program

Action Research Project
Site: Tinley Park, Illinois
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Abstract

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Date: April 30, 1996

Title: Improving the Reading Skills of At-Risk Students

This report described a program for increasing reading ability in order to reduce the academic failure of identified at-risk students. The targeted population consisted of second and sixth grade students in a growing middle class suburban community located south-west of a large metropolitan area. Evidence for the existence of this problem was gathered from teacher observations, assessments, standardized tests and surveys.

Literature suggested that probable causes for the problem included: socioeconomic factors resulting in a lack of parental attention, inadequate student motivation, and frequent curricular changes that were not supported by staff development.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of four areas of intervention: a parental involvement program; integrating trade books and basal readers into the curriculum; development of task group activities incorporating the use of cooperative strategies; partnered reading; and teacher read alouds; and writing extension activities.

Results of the intervention revealed an improvement in reading comprehension, both silent and oral. Volunteering to read orally was increased, attentiveness was lengthened and consequently reading for enjoyment was significantly improved.

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Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

Problem Statement

The students of the targeted schools who are at-risk for school failure exhibit poor reading skills that interfere with academic success. Evidence for the existence of this problem was gathered from teacher observations, teacher-made tests, standardized tests, and surveys.

Immediate Problem Context A

Target school A is one of five district elementary schools. It houses 486 students in grades kindergarten through six. Based on the 1993-1994 school year figures, the average class size for each grade level is as follows: Kindergarten - 23.3, first grade - 24.3, second grade - 26, third grade - 28.8, fourth grade - 28, fifth grade - 26. There are three sessions of kindergarten and three classes each of grades one through five. Two cross-categorical (CC) classes are housed in the building. CCI contains six students from ages six through eight and the CCII class has seven students ages nine and ten. These students are mainstreamed with their peers for art, music, and physical education. One and one-half resource teachers are employed to service 30 students either in their classrooms or in small groups. A Project Pro Program is

also housed at target school A servicing three and four year olds from throughout the district.

The building is air-conditioned in the third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms. The staff is comprised of 25 teachers, 23 female and two males. The average number of years experience is 12.2 with 47.9 percent of the district teachers having a Master's degree.

As of September 30,1993, the racial-ethnic make up for school A students was 94.7 percent White, 0.6 percent Black, 2.1 percent Hispanic, 2.5 percent Asian Pacific Islander, and 0.2 percent Native American. The percentage of students eligible for bilingual education is 1.0 percent, lower than the district average of 1.4 percent. The attendance rate is 96.3 percent compared to 96.0 percent district wide. The student mobility rate, which is based on the number of times students enroll or leave a school during the course of the school year, is 3.1 percent. This is lower than the district rate of 9.5 percent. Students who were absent from school without a valid cause for ten percent or more of the last 180 days comprise 0.0 percent. (School Report Card 1994)

Students are heterogeneously assigned to classrooms. The students in grades third through fifth are ability grouped for math and reading classes. Gifted students are grouped in clusters of six students per a grade level teacher in grades third through fifth. The core subject areas and time devoted to them are as follows: mathematics - 60 minutes, science - 30 minutes, language arts - 150 minutes, and social studies - 30 minutes. In addition to core subjects, students in grades one through five receive 25 minutes of physical education three times a week, 25 minutes of music twice a week, and art for 35 minutes once a week.

Students in third grade are assessed by the state in reading, math and

writing. Fourth grade is state-assessed in science and social studies. In addition, students in grades second and fifth are given the California Test of Basic Skills. All students are assessed quarterly on a district-wide progress report card. Grades consist of Excellent, Satisfactory or Needs Improvement in first and second grade. Letter grades are given as follows for the third through fifth grades: A (92 - 100), B (85 - 92), C (72 - 84), D (65 - 71), and F (0 - 64).

The teachers at target school A use a whole-language, literature-based approach to reading with the basal series, Houghton-Mifflin, used as a reference for skills, vocabulary, and comprehension. The connection of reading and writing across the curriculum is accomplished through the use of Lee Pensinger's *Power Writing* along with *Daily Oral Language*, and the Harcourt, Brace, Javanovich language series. The social science curriculum for grades one through five utilizes the Macmillan, McGraw-Hill Social Studies series. *Mathematics in Action* by Macmillan, McGraw-Hill is used with Math Their Way. The science curriculum uses the Silver-Burdett Ginn series supplemented with Directed Activities for Science, Health and Technology (D.A.S.H.) activities.

Immediate Problem Context B

Target school B, one of two junior high schools, houses 716 students in grades six through eight. Both schools A and B are in the same district. The average class size based on the 1993-1994 school year figures are: sixth grade - 28.6, seventh grade - 27.7, and eight grade - 26.3. There are eight sixth grade classes, eight seventh grade classes and nine eighth grade classes. The building is two years old, triangular in shape and air-conditioned with each wing housing a separate grade level.

As of September 30, 1993, the racial-ethnic make up of the student population was reported as 96.2 percent White, 0.0 percent Black, 1.7 percent Hispanic, 2.1 percent Asian Pacific Islander, and 0.0 Native American. The percent of students eligible for bilingual education is 0.7 percent, slightly lower than the district average of 1.4 percent. The attendance rate is 96.3 percent compared to 96.0 percent district-wide. The student mobility rate is 10.4 percent. Students who were absent from school without a valid cause for 10.0 percent or more the last 180 school days comprises 0.0 percent for school B. (School Report Card 1994).

The staff is comprised of 46 teachers, 34 females and 12 males. Master's degrees have been attained by 47 percent of the teachers. The average years experience is 12. The racial-ethnic background of the faculty is White.

The students are heterogeneously assigned to a homeroom. The core subject areas and time devoted to them are as follows: language arts - 84 minutes, mathematics, science, and social science - 42 minutes. Target school B uses a team-teaching environment and operates under a middle school philosophy. There are five educational teams for teaching the core curriculum. The enrichment staff of five teachers provide education in the enrichment areas of computers, art, foreign language, music, and applied technology. The physical education staff is made up of five teachers instructing in the areas of physical education, health, and modern life skills. Two cross-categorical special education classrooms provide specialized education for 29 students. All students are mainstreamed for enrichment and physical education classes and 12 students are mainstreamed for one or two academic classes. A resource teacher is employed to work with twenty students either individually or in the classroom in cooperation with the teacher. Clusters of gifted students are

scheduled into most of the regular education classrooms. The students meet and work once a week with a gifted coordinator. A social worker and a school counselor are also on staff on a rotating schedule with two of the primary buildings. The media center and additional computer lab are available to students and staff members at all times.

The students are assessed by the Illinois Goal Assessment Program in grades six, seven and eight. The sixth and eighth grade students are assessed in reading, mathematics and writing. The seventh grade students are assessed in science and social science.

The California Test of Basic Skills is another instrument used in the assessment of the students in grade seven. The students are also evaluated by district-made local assessment tests in grades six, seven, and eight. Students are assessed on district report cards. Letter grades are given as follows: A (92-100), B (85-92), C (72-84), D (65-71), and F (0-64).

The teachers at school B use a whole-language, literature-based approach to reading with the base series,Houghton-Mifflin, as a reference for skills, vocabulary and comprehension. The connection of reading and writing across the curriculum is accomplished through the use of Lee Pensinger's *Power Writing* along with *Daily Oral Language*, and the series Harcourt, Brace, and Javanovich. The social science curriculum utilizes MacMillan, McGraw-Hill Social Studies, and *Daily Oral Geography*. The mathematics series used are as follows: Macmillan, McGraw-Hill - grade six; University of Chicago, *Transition and Algebra* - grades seven and eight; University of Chicago, *Geometry*, grade eight. The science curriculum for grades six and seven is F.A.S.T., with Silver-Burdett *Biology* being used in grade eight.

One hundred percent of the teachers in the target schools (A & B) are

White. Males comprise 12.2 percent and females account for 87.8 percent of the teaching staff. The average years of teaching experience in the district is 12.2 with an average salary of $33,588. The pupil-teacher ratio is 22.2:1. Teachers with a master's degree and beyond comprise 47.9 percent of the total 221 teachers. The average administrator's salary is $65,994 in the targeted school district where as the state average is $63,706. The pupil-administrator ratio is 298.9:1. The amount spent per pupil in the district for 1992-93 (the most current available) was $3,581 while the state average was $5,579. (School District Report Card 1994)

An important issue that the community and school district faces is the rapid change of area farm lands to housing developments, which has led to overcrowding in the schools. Recent construction of a new junior high and additions to several of the primary buildings has caused financial problems along with state funding cuts. The recent loss of the Chapter I program in three of the elementary buildings coupled with the loss of the district ESL (English as Second Language) program will have tremendous impact on students and teachers alike.

Description of Surrounding Community

The schools are located in a suburban area southwest of a large metropolitan area. The community consists of 13.8 square miles with a population of 40,000. As of 1992, the average home value was $139,611. The average household income was $56,719. (Census, 1993)

In this district 95.4 percent of the population is White, 0.4 percent is Black, 2.1 percent is Hispanic, and 2.1 percent is Asian Pacific Islander. Of the 4,484students enrolled, 1.7 are from lower income families and 1.4 percent are

limited English proficient. The educational levels of the residents of this district are as follows: 10.26 percent attended some high school, 33.15 percent are high school graduates, 25.62 percent have some college education, 13.27 percent have a bachelor degree, and 4.52 percent have a graduate degree.

Regional and National Context of Problem

A paramount problem in today's educational system is an increase in the number of students who are lacking basic skills. These low achieving students are at-risk for school failure. at-risk refers to those students whose intelligence is within normal limits but who are failing to achieve the basic skills necessary for success in school and life. (Slavin, 1989)

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement felt this issue to be important enough to hold a conference to determine what programs could be used for students at-risk of failure. This 1985 meeting of educators was in search of effective means of instruction. What has been beneficial for the at-risk student? What has not been successful? (Slavin, 1985)

The issue of low achieving students is becoming more serious. The economy is moving away from jobs for workers lacking basic skills. Allowing large numbers of disadvantaged students to leave school with minimal skills ensures them a life of poverty and dependence,the consequences of which are disastrous to the social cohesiveness and the well-being of our nation. (Slavin, 1989)

Low achievement is by no means restricted to poor or minority students; more than 10 percent of advantaged students lack the ability to read popular magazines, and only half have the reading skills considered necessary to read

most newspapers, stories, or popular novels. (NAEP, 1985).

The fact that a substantial proportion of students fail to attain an adequate level of basic skills says nothing at all about the capacity of these children to learn; rather it says that given the level of resources we are able or willing to commit to the education of all students and the way in which these resources are used in practice, a certain proportion of students will not succeed. (Slavin, 1989). "While it is certain that virtually all students can learn, instructional methods and materials now in use are failing large numbers of students" (Slavin, 1989, p.3). In recent years, educators have put an emphasis on the early identification of children who are likely to fail in school. Proponents of this move stress that early screening coupled with remediation will help at-risk students become successful in school by acquiring basic skills. (Mantzicopoulos et. al., 1992)

Success in the early grades does not guarantee success throughout the school years and beyond, but failure in the early grades does virtually guarantee failure in later schooling. (Karweit & Slavin, 1992)

The challenge for the future is to reappraise what at-risk students need and how to serve them through compensatory and other programs. (Chelemer, 1991) "Reform is needed at all levels of education, but no goal of reform is as important as seeing that all children start off their school careers with success, confidence, and a firm foundation in reading" (Karweit & Slavin, 1992, p.11)

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Evidence

School A

In order to compile an initial list of possible at-risk for failure students, a review of the district information placement cards was made (Appendix A). School policy requires all teachers to fill out a placement card on each student noting academic levels, social skills and areas of weakness and concerns. These cards are then used to assist in classroom assignments for the following year.

By evaluating the cards of the targeted second grades, it was noted that fourteen out of forty-eight students were considered low-level readers. Additional information was obtained through a survey (see Appendix B). Analysis of the data identified areas of weakness as is listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Information Cards - Areas of Weakness, School A
(2nd Grade Students)

study skills	6
work habits	9
organization	7
motivation	4
needs structure	14
immature	6
has problems with others	1

The numbers indicate weaknesses present out of the targeted group of 14 students. According to the findings we determined that all the children were significantly at-risk due to many factors. Interpretation of the data indicates that the targeted students were deficient in three major areas: the lack of structure, work habits and study skills.

Upon administering the Primary Interest Survey (Appendix C), we determined that much of the information collected could be reclassified into 5 sub-headings for the purpose of making the findings understandable. The resulting data follows in Table 2.

Table 2
Reading Interest Survey - 2nd Grade

	Yes	No	?
Visited a library	11	3	
Attended a library story hour	7	7	
Likes reading	9	4	1
Is read outloud to	10	4	
Believes reading is important	12	1	1

Though there has been limited exposure to reading, our research indicated the targeted children possessed an overall interest in reading. A Reading Diagnostic Survey (Appendix D) was administered. As indicated by the accumulated results of the diagnostic checklist, (See Table 3), there are several apparent weaknesses in each category analyzed. Beginning with the area of Word Analysis the results reflect severe weaknesses in the targeted students phonetic skills and in the use of context clues. The targeted group shows significant deficiency in four of seven areas of oral reading concentration.

Students' abilities to read silently and recall information would be the least developed of the four categories. The lack of adequate skills should be regarded as developmentally on target.

The reading interest and effort is the area requiring the most attention. The numbers indicate a greater need for improvement than any other overall area.

Table 3
Reading Diagnostic Checklist I
(Second Graders)

+	-	Word Analysis Abilities
4	10	Visual Memory of words
4	10	Solving words by sounding
2	12	Sounds of blends, phonograms
0	3	Use of context clues
NA	NA	Remembering new words taught
		Oral Reading Abilities
6	8	Comprehension in oral reading
1	13	Errors on easy words / sight words
4	10	Addition or omission of words
8	6	Repetition of words or phrases
0	14	Ignoring punctuation
1	13	Guesses at words
3	11	Word by word reading
		Silent Reading and Recall
0	14	Low rate of speed
3	11	Comprehension
4	10	Tracking with fingers
		Reading Interest and Effort
0	14	Attention and persistence
3	11	Voluntary reading
2	12	Self-directed work; workbooks
		+ Adequate - Needs Improvement

School B

By evaluating the placement cards (Appendix E) of the targeted sixth grades, it was noted that out of 30 students, three fell into the high reading category, 18 were considered average and 9 scored in the low range. Additional areas of concern were noted and tallied to help provide more information on the students. A summary of the areas questioned and the responses is presented in Table four.

Table 4
Information Cards - Areas of weakness, School B
(6th Grade Students)

	YES	NO
Study Skills	12	18
Work Habits	10	20
Organization	8	22
Motivation	5	25
Needs Structure	8	22
Immature	4	26
Problems with others	6	24

Of the 30 students reviewed, 40 percent had problems with study skills and 33 percent had problems with work habits. Further analysis of the cards indicated that 27 percent of the students have a problem with organization and 17 percent with motivation. The need for more structure affects 27 percent of the students and an over all low maturity level was noted on 13 percent of the cards.

Table 5
Interest Inventory--School B
(6th Grade Students)

	YES	NO	?
Reading--Favorite subject	2	8	
Recently read a book	8	1	1
Reads a daily newspaper	3	6	1
Subscribes to a magazine	7	2	1
Owns a library card	8	1	1
Regularly goes to library	4	5	1
Reads aloud to someone	4	6	
?- - No answer given			

The Interest Inventory (Appendix F) was given to all students the first week of the school year before the teacher / researcher had any knowledge of the students' ability levels, interests, or attitudes. The above results indicate that the identified students at targeted school B don't consider reading their favorite subject. It is obvious from Table 5 that the students do not associate reading for enjoyment with reading class in school. 80 percent of the 6th graders have recently read a book and do own a library card where as only 40 percent of the students visit the library regularly. It should also be noted that a large number, 70 percent of the students, receive magazines at home, whereas only 40 percent even read the newspaper.

The Diagnostic Checklist II (Appendix G) was administered in order to better understand the students' strengths and weaknesses in reading. The results are noted in Table 6 on the following page.

Table 6
Reading Diagnostic Checklist II
(6th Graders)

+	-	Word Analysis Abilities
9	1	Solving words by syllables
9	1	Use of context clues
8	2	Remembering new words taught
N/A	N/A	Dictionary skills: Location, pronunciation
		Oral Reading Abilities
1	9	Comprehension in oral reading
7	3	Incorrect phrasing; ignores punctuation
7	3	Errors on easy words
2	8	Expression in reading
7	3	Addition or omission of words
6	4	Repetition of words or phrases
6	4	Speed of reading
		Silent Reading and Recall
1	9	Comprehension in silent reading
7	3	Whispering and lip movements
1	9	Poor recall on questions
7	3	Attention and persistence
3	7	Unaided written recall
4	6	Skimming and locating information
		Reading Interest and Effort
3	7	Voluntary reading
2	8	Self-directed
		+ Adequate -- Needs Improvement

As can be noted by the accumulated results of the diagnostic checklist (see Table 6), there are weaknesses in three of the four categories analyzed. Word analysis skills was not considered a problem area for the targeted sixth grade students.

Comprehension skills, whether in oral or silent reading, were deficient for 90 percent of the students evaluated. Further analysis showed that 90 percent of the students had poor recall on the questions they were asked orally and 70 percent had trouble writing down answers to questions presented in a printed format. This is an area of great concern since so much of the sixth grade curriculum requires grade appropriate reading comprehension skills.

Reading interest and effort was the last area analyzed and it should be noted that only 30 percent of the students voluntarily chose books to read during quiet time / study hall. During the students' free time, 20 percent asked for library passes in order to check out or renew books.

Probable Cause

Evidence of the problem can be found in the present socioeconomic conditions facing today's parents. "The social and economic changes in today's society show a dramatic increase in the number of households in which both parents work as well as in the number of single parent households" (Virgil, p.52). This phenomenon has a direct relation to student achievement in school. "The home as the incubator for reading skills appears to be on the decline, and the number of children who begin school with little or no reading habits is increasing drastically" (Virgil, p. 52). It has become necessary for both parents in the home to be employed due to the inflated prices of homes, groceries, utilities, and medical care. This creates a situation where many children are forced to spend time in daycare or preschools instead of in their own homes. Parents who work are often too tired to spend educational time with their children. Their leisure time is spent driving car pools, shopping, and preparing for the next day's activities.

Cable television, movie rentals, and video games, have taken the place of quiet family time together. Overbooked parents are relying on the schools to fill the needs of their children. Teachers, however, "want parents to share responsibilities such as reading and tutoring their children at home, motivating their children to be interested in learning; and contacting teachers when there are changes in the home environment" (Dixon, p. 16).

Trelease (1989) suggests that it is not time but dedication to parenting that makes the difference. Most adults today can find time to read newspapers, attend social functions, go to sporting events, shows, and watch television, but do not spend quality time with their children. Priorities must be set and then adhered to.

The reality of the situation is that "eighty-five per cent of a child's life is outside school" (Hofkins, p. 13). What is accomplished during this eighty-five per cent can determine a child's success in school. It is through the family that a child receives the encouragement and motivation necessary to succeed in school.

Lack of motivation has long been believed to be a problem for at-risk students. Many educators believe that a student is either motivated to achieve or not motivated and it has little to do with the classroom environment. Some theorists believe that a student's motivation level is directly related to his experiences in specific classroom situations (Stipek, 1990) therefore placing the responsibility back on the classroom teacher. In opposition, McClelland in Stipek (1990, p.9), "claimed that achievement motivation is an unconscious trait that develops early in life as a consequence of parents' behavior toward children in achievement situations".

Lack of motivation also depends on the age of the child. Young children who lack the motivation to complete work may be too immature and not developmentally ready for school work. As students get older they "often have poor motivation to learn and a marked decline in their attitudes toward school" (Hootstein, p.31). This is thought to

be due to self-absorbed thoughts about peer relations and personal growth. Whatever the underlying cause of motivation problems, changes need to be made at both school and at home in order for the at-risk student to achieve academic success.

Another possible explanation for the evidence of this problem could be the existence of frequent curricular changes not supported by staff development. In an attempt to closely examine the targeted district's reading program, the services of a consultant were secured. Johns concluded his findings by stating "frustration, lack of direction and crowded curriculum" (1995, p. 18) would continue to be present if a better option was not developed. Johns (1995) suggests that the curriculum of the targeted district was not supported by a strong staff development program. Amidst an era of restructuring, enhancing the curriculum is not enough to sustain the students' needs. Attending to the needs of the staff that delivers the curriculum is particularly vital. Strickland (1993, p. 5) states that "massive, multi-faceted changes prove to be overwhelming". The literature suggests that trying to impose too many curricular changes at too rapid a pace is to be regarded as detrimental to staff and ultimately students. According to Hendricks-Lee, Soled, and Yinger (1995), teachers are expected to understand new curriculum or procedures from short workshops or in-service days and to implement them from this training. In comparison, teachers would never expect that kind of learning from their students.

Strickland (1993), suggests that knowledge is the key element relative to change. Increasing our knowledge and informing those around us will definitively help focus our concerns. An investigation of the data obtained as well as the literature relevant to this problem indicated that a lack of reading abilities may be due to the following:

1) Socioeconomic conditions that confront today's parents.
2) Lack of student motivation.
3) Frequent curricular changes not supported by staff development.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

Parental Involvement

Parent involvement is vital in nurturing a child's growth and developing a link between school literacy and home literacy (Allen, 1993). Education today involves a collaborative effort between school and home. Parents and teachers must enter a partnership so that they both can contribute to a child's progress. "Schools provide children with the best available classroom methods and involve parents in supporting school success - the two essential principles of ensuring success for all students" (Learning, Apr./May, 1995, p.66). Pikulski (1994) points out that parent involvement in reading is effective in the success of many established intervention programs. Daily at home reading is not only recommended, but required as a key part of these programs. If parents don't value reading, spend time modeling it, or feel it is important, the child won't think it is important either. "Reading habits are established early by parents who value books and encourage their children to read' (Glazer, 1980, p.1). Parent involvement, then, not only can contribute to a child's success in school, it is essential to achieving that success.

Trade Books and Basal Readers

During the last decade, reading has taken a different focus. Traditionally the curriculum has been instructor directed, with all academics generated by the teacher.

There was an emphasis on skills, however student interest wasn't a priority. Instructional innovations are now based on individual needs. This recent trend moves emphasis away from the use of basal reading series and toward the use of trade books and novels. The basal reading approach is felt to be too fragmented and lacks the interest students need. It relies heavily on short stories and workbook pages that are not believed to have any carry over into other subject areas (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 1993). Skills are believed to be isolated in broken pieces of text. In spite of these criticisms, it has long been felt that basal reading series provide the backbone of a reading program, and according to Shavelson, 1983, they continue to "play a critical role in the decisions teachers make regarding reading instruction" (Shavelson, 1983, p 396)

Some teachers feel that basal readers provide students with good stories and choices. They are less likely to omit any skills, and they like "the routine and predictability of the basal program" (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 1993, p. 60). Statewide achievement testing and local assessments are used to evaluate students' abilities, and because of this, teachers and parents feel confident that all the necessary skills will be taught through the use of a basal reading series.

Classroom reading programs should focus on meeting the higher level needs of students. To develop more enjoyment and creativity in reading and language arts, trade books and novels should be incorporated into the curriculum. Trade books can provide a focus on developing higher level thinking skills, creativity, and the transfer for thoughts and ideas into other subject areas (Lipton, 1992). Students enjoy the reading experience more if these less traditional materials are used. A feeling of enthusiasm and excitement is fostered when children experience a whole text. Trade books allow the students to build an understanding by enabling them to connect new information with past experiences (Lipton, 1992). They provide choices for students,

encourage independent reading, and foster an understanding of feelings and emotions.

According to Dr. Jerry Johns of Northern Illinois University, an approach using both a basal series and trade books can better meet the needs of the wide range of students in the classroom. Skill development alone in reading does not ensure success. A combined approach of a basal series and trade books is the best option available at this time (Johns,1995). This combination would enable teachers to meet and exceed the expectations of parents and administrators, to have the security of preparing for standardized tests, and still encourage creativity. Students will be more responsive to activities and motivated to continue learning and discovering.

Task Groups

The benefits of oral reading have long been dismissed by advocates of a silent reading approach with children. Wilkinson, Wardrop, & Anderson, (1988) reanalyzed research on oral reading and found an increase in reading comprehension for beginning readers and problem readers who engage in oral reading.

It is important to differentiate between oral reading by students and reading orally to students. The term read alouds refers to the oral reading of a piece of literature, by an adult, to a child. Reading aloud to children constitutes "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading." (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 22). In reading aloud to children, you should make sure that the children are young enough to model what they see you doing or hear you reading; to make sure the readings are interesting enough to hold their interest; and finally, the readings should fit the attention span of your audience. When you read aloud to children, "you condition the child to associate reading with pleasure, create background knowledge, and provide a reading role model" (Trelease, 1989, p.8)

Reading orally to students provides the student with the opportunity to interact with the text. This method is the beginning of learning to read independently for young children. Its advantages are many. Read alouds enable the students to use their imaginations, as they visualize what they hear. Students are exposed to a wide range of literature, much of which would be too difficult for them to read independently. Vocabulary can be expanded through listening, while students internalize new information. The main goal of reading orally to children, however, is to foster a life long love for reading. "We seem to do a better job of teaching students to read than instilling in them the desire to do so " (Cullinan, 1987, p. 72)

Read alouds transmit the pleasure of reading and invite the listeners to become readers. When reading is pleasurable, students are encouraged to read independently, as they have connected with the text. The National Reading Research Center suggests that "the challenge remains to develop not only competent readers and writers but also children who are interested in reading and writing and thus motivated to do so voluntarily for pleasure and information" (Morrow & Sharkey, 1994, p. 163). Through daily exposure to read alouds, children will develop skills to read independently, and will gain background information to enhance their scope of previous knowledge.

Sharing books with children also gives them the opportunity to learn to imitate the reader's oral expression and comprehension strategies. "Listeners learn about letter-sound relationships, good sentence structure, and story grammar" (Hicks & Wadlington, 994, p. 422). It is through this exposure to literature that we hope children will become critical thinkers. Discussion of the text allows children to understand the 20 story structure. They can make predictions, identify the story situation, describe the characters, and explain how the story ended.

The practice of read alouds has always been popular in the primary grades. Dr.

Johns has found that oral reading to students diminishes as students get older. (Johns, 1995). He states that "a systematic plan for sharing narrative and informational literature is essential" (Johns, 1995, p.22). All children, whether seven or seventeen, should be exposed to shared book experiences. Read alouds should consist of good literature, with a high interest level. "Reading stories aloud provides models: It's pleasurable and immerses children in the language of good writers, which can increase children's motivation for both reading and writing" (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993, p. 57)

A collaborative method of learning called partner/buddy reading offers the advantages of oral reading combined with cooperative strategies. Zemelman et al., 1993, describe in Best Practice many variations that can be implemented. Students can take turns reading aloud to each other, discussing pieces they have read, or jigsawing a text. The intention is to move children toward higher order thinking. Baloche & Platt (1993) suggest that there is a relationship between cooperatively working, whether in pairs or groups and nurturing a sense of creativity.

Along with developing a sense of creativity, cooperative activities help students develop personal and social responsibility by holding them accountable for their own work and the work of their group members. Johnson & Johnson (1989) explain that through the use of formal and informal cooperative groups and cooperative base groups, "students become more enthusiastic learners, their learning and retention increases, and both students and teachers have more fun in school" (Johnson & Johnson, 1989, p. 89). Additional benefits from cooperative learning are that students develop strong scholastic aspirations, increased participation, and productivity.

Writing Activities

Writing is the link between reading and what is recorded, reflected upon, or reported. Topics for writing are obtained through exposure to what is read or what is

read to you. It is, therefore, an extension of the oral reading experience. "Writing is one of the most complex and important of academic abilities" (Zemelman, et al., 1993, p. 50). Writing is the means where by students can express their thoughts, create something imaginary, or respond to the literature they hear. This means of communication encourages the use of higher order thinking skills. Students can analyze the texts they have been exposed to by taking the information apart and looking at the pieces. Furthermore, they can integrate and synthesize their responses to literature. Conclusions can be drawn, inferences can be formed, relationships can be established, and new and prior knowledge can be connected.

The implementation of journal writing gives all students the opportunity to write. Children can take ownership and responsibility for what they choose to communicate. As Harst puts it, "Students change from tenants of our text to owners of their own" (Lewin, 1992, p. 586). Writing is a risk taking venture where students must make choices. Teachers should strive to build a climate of trust and support where students can freely express their ideas and take risks. Pre-writing activities such as charting, webbing, and brainstorming, will generate ideas. These ideas can be recorded in personal journals or shared in dialogue journals. Sharing can be done in pairs, in cooperative groups, between student and teacher, or presented to the whole class. Students need to share their writing with a real audience. Bound books, classroom displays, and reporting are a few examples of how writing becomes "published". "When students hear and read one another's work in a positive setting, they are inspired to try new topics and learn new writing strategies" (Zemelman et al., 1993, p. 54).

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

After investigation into the probable causes (in the preceding chapter), as well as the review of the literature on this subject, the following project objective is proposed:

As a result of altered instructional emphasis related to reading achievement during the period of September 1995 to February 1996, the second and sixth grade students, as identified as at-risk for failure, from the targeted classes will increase their reading ability as measured by teacher observation, and a reading diagnostic checklist.

In order to accomplish the terminal objectives, the following processes are necessary:

1. A parental involvement program that would reinforce reading skills will be developed.

2. A series of reading activities integrating the use of trade books with the basal reading program will be developed.

3. Writing activities will be constructed to extend reading skills.

4. Task group instruction will incorporate the formation and the use of cooperative skills, paired learning and student read alouds.

Action Plan for the Intervention

I. Parental Involvement

Parents will be asked to monitor their child's reading time at home through a semi-weekly reading checklist (grade 2) and a daily homework checklist (reading inclusive-grade 6). Children at the second grade level will use a "parent-shared" reading method involving the oral reading of chosen books by themselves and an adult for 15 minute intervals. This will be required twice a week with the adult's signature serving as validation of the completed activity. Children at the sixth grade level will read a chosen book using the "parent-shared" method for 20 minute intervals on a daily basis. An adult's signature will be required in their assignment notebook to validate the completion of this assignment.

II. Trade Books and Basal Readers

Targeted grade levels will benefit from exposure to both trade books and basal texts. As part of the district-required curriculum and state mandated time allotment, trade books and basal readers will be used interchangeably at the discretion of the teacher.

III. Task Groups

The targeted children will be assigned to task groups consisting of no more than five students each. Goals for these groups include skill introduction and/or reinforcement, vocabulary development and comprehension. Through the use of pair/share reading (partnered reading), cooperative strategies, and teacher read-alouds (where the teacher reads orally to the entire class) these goals will be met.

Task groups will meet on a daily basis. Curricular demands or thematic units will determine what is taught.

IV. Writing Activities

Chapter and story summaries will be written as a comprehensive part of the students' reading/language arts experience.

Frequent journal activities will help to improve both writing skills and phonetic/word attack skills. All targeted students will use a spiral notebook for recording journal entries. Entries may include personal thought, journal stems, or starters, character or story analysis and creative writing activities.

Method of Assessment

Assessment will be based on teacher observation of performance in reading. The teachers will readminister both the reading interest surveys (Appendix C & F) and the diagnostic checklists (Appendix D & G).

Chapter 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The purpose of this research project was to reduce the academic failure of at-risk students by increasing their reading ability. Evidence was gathered from two different schools, at the second and sixth grade levels; therefore, some of the intervention procedures were different.

School A

Parent involvement was used by the researchers to encourage reading at home. An introductory letter (Appendix H) was sent home prior to the beginning of the program, explaining all the necessary information. The expectation was that the child would read to an adult or the adult would read to the child. Record sheets were then stapled into manila file folders for each student in the classroom (Appendix I). These sheets contained a date and a place for parent signatures, verifying the reading was done. The folders were distributed to the children on Mondays and returned to the teacher on Fridays. After the folder was returned to school, the researcher rewarded the student by placing a stamp or sticker on the appropriate date. Two of the targeted students did not return their parent participation folder. One

researcher noted that this aspect of the intervention was not being carried out, so an aide at school A was solicited to read with the two targeted children for the fifteen minutes twice a week. This intervention was started in October, 1995 and continued through February, 1996.

The implementation of trade books (Appendix J) with the basal series provided students with an abundance and variety of materials to read at their level. Trade books were used to supplement the curriculum weekly. In addition to the regular basal lessons taught, trade books were chosen by students to read and report on. Opportunities to read the chosen books were given by the teacher in the form of silent reading time. Initially, picture books were available to each student. When a book was completed, another could be chosen. This began in October and shifted in difficulty in late November with the introduction of "chapter books". The approach continued through February.

The formation of task groups allowed students to work with each other on selected assignments and benefit from cooperative strategies. The emphasis in the task groups was to introduce and reinforce reading skills, develop vocabulary, and increase comprehension. The entire class was divided into task groups throughout the intervention. The targeted students were not restricted to their own task group, but rather were intermingled with other class members. The task groups changed frequently, enabling the targeted students to cooperate with all ability levels. Development of social skills was the primary focus for the group since it had no other experience with cooperative learning. In forming basic social skills, the students worked on using 6 inch voices, listening to their neighbors, staying with their groups, and encouraging others. Learning roles, the use of "T" charts, reflective processing and cognitive processing were all featured. Many activities were included daily when meeting with their group. The groups engaged in partnered reading of trade books.

class collections, and basal stories. Pair/share reading took place when the task group was not involved in direct instruction. The targeted students were not limited to do partnered reading with only task group members; but were able to select any classmate. This process enabled students of all reading levels to share books.

Oral reading was used as an integral part of the daily language arts program. Teacher read alouds were done with the students gathering on the classroom rug so that the researcher could share a trade book with the entire class. These trade books were taken from the selection of thematic, seasonal, or holiday books on display for partnered reading. A listing of these trade books can be found in Appendix J. The teacher modeled correct oral reading of a book, generating discussion and comments about the text. The researcher monitored the class' progress as a whole.

Writing activities were used to broaden the students' comprehension skills and encourage them to think critically and creatively. Journal writing allowed for reflection, as well as, providing an easy way to use skills necessary in letter writing. Entries included personal thoughts, journal stems, story starters, story analysis, and creative writing activities. Students also used writing to create class books. At times, students kept a record of the important events that occurred during each month, and compiled a writing workshop folder. Power writing is a curricular requirement and was easily incorporated into journaling by using stem starters. Opportunities were provided for students to share their writings orally. This added enrichment to the work, created an interest in writing, and allowed the students to think about what they heard.

School B

The researcher at School B carried out all of the components of the proposed solution strategies. After reviewing the district placement cards, administering the student interest inventory, and completing the reading diagnostic checklist, the

researcher took the following steps as intervention. First, a letter (Appendix K) was sent home asking that the selected students and parents read for twenty minutes daily using the "parent-shared" approach of reading. The material read together could include assignments from their science, social studies or reading textbook or a novel of their choice. A list of the books available in the classroom was also sent home. (Appendix L). To keep track of the time spent reading, the parents were asked to fill in and sign their child's assignment book on a daily basis. Points were earned for time spent reading outside of school. The notebooks were then checked each day by the researcher. Time spent reading was documented and points were earned for time spent reading outside of school. In order to encourage more reading at home, incentives or rewards such as free pop or chips, Subway coupons, and free novels were given out.

A series of reading activities integrating the use of novels with the basal reading program was centered around curriculum driven themes and integrated with either science or social studies. Teacher read alouds listed in Appendix L became a part of reading class. Writing activities such as journal entries, journal stems, and wrap arounds were often completed either following cooperative group activities or student or teacher real alouds. Story mapping along with character webbing , compare and contrast, Venn diagrams and sequel writing were assigned with each novel or short story read. Paired learning along with many of the cooperative group activities were done two to three times a week. The researcher started this project with daily activities planned but due to the bell schedule and short class periods, the frequency had to be reduced. A variety of ideas were used in assigning cooperative groups. The researcher started with groups of four and by November had cut the group sizes down to three. It was noted that with groups of four or five students, two students always seemed to be sitting and watching. Groups of two or three encouraged much more

interaction. Since the students' desks are grouped by two in three double rows, the paired learning was most often done with their "neighbor". This pairing system proved to be a time saver and left no room for arguing over groupings.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

School A

It is the conclusion of the researchers that there was an improvement in the reading ability of the targeted students, which helped to reduce their academic failure. Three students exhibited significant weaknesses which could be indicators of possible learning disabilities. Testing at a later date will be necessary to determine whether or not a learning disability is present. Evidence of success may be minimal due to their impaired learning processes. This possibility could have had an influence on our findings.

The surveys that were originally presented to the students at the onset of the study (see Chapter Two), were again administered to the targeted elementary students. The questions which made up the survey were identical to the pre-intervention survey. The students were informed that their responses were confidential, and they were encouraged to answer as honestly as they could. The resulting data follows in Table--

Table 8
Interest Inventory--School A
(Second Graders)

	Fall	Spring
	Y / N / ?	Y / N / ?
Visited a library	11 / 3 / 0	14 / 0 / 0
Attended a library story hour	7 / 7 / 0	5 / 9 / 0
Likes reading	9 / 4 / 1	12 / 2 / 0
Is read outloud to	10 / 4 / 0	11 / 3 / 0
Believes reading is important	12 / 1 / 1	13 / 1 / 0

Significant findings revealed an increase of 24% in the area of reading for enjoyment. The researchers found a positive attitude toward reading was developed simultaneously with an increased motivation to read. Since the pre-survey indicated a high level of interest, the post survey showed little variance in results. Maintained student interest in reading was apparent.

The diagnostic checklists, used to determine which students were at-risk, were reevaluated after the intervention was completed.

Table 9

Reading Diagnostic Checklist II
(2nd Grade Students)

Fall Spring + Adequate -- Needs Improvement

	+ / -	+ / -	Word Analysis Abilities
1	4 / 10	10 / 4	Visual memory of words
2	4 / 10	7 / 7	Solving words by sounding
3	2 / 12	8 / 6	Sounds of blends, phonograms
4	0 / 14	12 / 2	Use of context clues
5	N/A	5 / 9	Remembering new words taught
			Oral Reading Abilities
1	6 / 8	13 / 1	Comprehension
2	1 / 13	12 / 2	Errors on easy words
3	4 / 10	14 / 0	Addition or omission of words
4	8 / 6	14 / 0	Repetition of words or phrases
5	0 / 14	9 / 5	Ignoring punctuation
6	1 / 13	3 / 11	Guesses at words
7	3 / 11	8 / 6	Word by word reading
			Silent Reading and Recall
1	0 / 14	9 / 5	Low rate of speed
2	3 / 11	8 / 6	Comprehension in silent reading
3	4 / 10	14 / 0	Tracking with fingers
			Reading Interest and Effort
1	0 / 14	12 / 2	Attention and persistence
2	3 / 11	11 / 3	Voluntary reading
3	2 / 12	9 / 5	Self-directed work; workbooks

All observed areas of the checklist showed improvement, some more dramatically than others. Word analysis abilities for the students had an overall increase with the most evident changes occurring in two areas. The students visual memory of words increased by 43 percent. Most obvious was the 64 percent increase in the number of students able to use context clues.

In the area of oral reading abilities, comprehension showed a 50 percent increase. This is a very meaningful improvement, as comprehension is the foundation for many other subject areas. Since a goal of this research was to reduce academic failure, increasing comprehension in written word would prove to be crucial in leading to success in other areas. Development of stronger sight word vocabularies and decreasing the number of mistakes showed dramatic improvement with a 79 percent growth. The areas of addition or omission of words and repetition of words also showed a large margin of improvement with 71 percent and 42 percent respectively One more area of strength was the area of ignoring punctuation which showed a 64 percent improvement. All these areas combined, lead to strong development and growth.

In the area of silent reading and recall, improvement was observed in all areas. There was a 36 percent increase in comprehension and drastic improvement in their speed of reading and a complete elimination of tracking words with their fingers.

The area of interest and effort was our most evident area of growth. Attention and persistence to read rose 86 percent, voluntary reading improved by 57 percent and the students ability to work on their own in a self-directed style increased by 50 percent. Having the motivation and the confidence to be successful is powerful

School B

The surveys that were originally distributed at the onset of the study were again administered to the targeted sixth grade students after the intervention period. Efforts were taken to ensure that the manner in which the survey was conducted was identical to the administration of the pre-intervention survey. The students were encouraged to be as "honest" as they could. The results were compared with the pre-intervention survey. A comparison of the resulting numbers from the two surveys is summarized in the chart below.

Table10
Interest Inventory--School B
(6th Grade Students)

	Fall	Spring
	Y / N / ?	Y / N / ?
Reading--Favorite Subject	2 / 8 / 0	2 / 7 / 1
Recently read a book	8 / 1 / 1	8 / 2 / 0
Subscribes to a magazine	7 / 2 / 1	6 / 4 / 0
Owns a library card	8 / 1 / 1	8 / 2 / 0
Regularly goes to a library	4 / 5 / 1	4 / 6 / 0
Reads aloud to someone	4 / 6 / 0	4 / 6 / 0
Reads a daily newspaper	3 / 6 / 1	4 / 5 / 1
? No answer given		

The data changed very little on the interest inventory from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention. The only change noted with reading as their favorite subject came from one student not answering the question to answering changing the blank to

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a No answer. The same happened with recently read a book, owning a library card and regularly goes to the library. The only Yes answer change came with reading a daily newspaper where one student changed his No answer to Yes. Reading aloud to someone did not change and it was noted that only the targeted students who had younger siblings were the ones who read outloud. The category of subscribing to a magazine caused some confusion. Some students misunderstood the question on the pre-survey as to be asking if any magazines came to their house instead of if they had their own subscription to a magazine of their own choice. That was the reasons stated for the change in the scores.

The Reading Diagnosis checklist was filled out again by the researcher at the end of the intervention period. Each of the identified children were asked to read both orally and silently from their reading textbook. Checks were made in each of the areas listed. Following is the Reading Diagnosis Checklist noting the pre and post intervention data.

Table10
Reading Diagnosis Checklist II
(6th Grade Students)

Fall Spring + Adequate --Needs Improvement

	+ / -	+ / -	Word Analysis Abilities
1	9 / 1	9 / 1	Solving words by sounding syllables
2	9 / 1	9 / 1	Use on context skills
3	8 / 2	8 / 2	Remembering new words taught
4	N/A	N / A	Dictionary skills
			Oral Reading Abilities
1	1 / 9	4 / 6	Comprehension in oral reading
2	7 / 3	7 / 3	Incorrect phrasing; ignores punctuation
3	7 / 3	7 / 3	Errors on easy words
4	2 / 8	5 / 5	Expression in reading
5	7 / 3	8 / 2	Addition or omission of words
6	6 / 4	8 / 2	Repetition of words or phrases
7	6 / 4	6 / 4	Speed of reading
			Silent Reading and Recall
1	1 / 9	3 / 7	Comprehension in silent reading
2	7 / 3	8 / 2	Whispering and lip movements
3	1 / 9	3 / 7	Recall on questions
4	7 / 3	9 / 1	Attention and persistence
5	3 / 7	4 / 6	Unaided written recall
6	4 / 6	6 / 4	Skimming and locating information
			Reading Interest and Effort
1	3 / 7	4 / 6	Voluntary reading
2	2 / 8	4 / 6	Self-directed

Three of the four areas observed showed improvement, some more dramatically than others. In the areas of word analysis, students scored high on the pre-intervention form and therefore no improvement was noted after the intervention.

In the area of oral reading abilities, comprehension and expression were the weakest areas evaluated initially, but showed the greatest increase of 30 percent on the post intervention observation. This is a significant improvement and should be

noted since good comprehension in reading does carry over into other subject areas.

In October, only 10 percent of the targeted students performed adequately in silent comprehension and recall of answers. A 20 percent gain was noted after the intervention in both areas but should still be considered a major area of concern since only 30 percent of the students performed adequately after the intervention. Skimming and locating information and attention and persistence showed a 20 percent increase. The problem of whispering and lip movements and unaided written recall only improved by 10 percent.

The last area evaluated, that of reading interest and effort was followed closely since both sub-categories scored very low in Oct. Voluntary reading improved by 10 percent going from 30 percent to 40 percent of the targeted students performing adequately. The students' ability to work on their own in a self-directed style increased by 20 percent.

Conclusions and Recommendations

School A

It is the conclusions of the teachers/researchers that the targeted students improved their reading ability. Evidence of growth in many areas was noted and added to an overall improvement in the students attitudes toward reading. Analyzing words, oral reading and silent reading all improved. The students' interest level and their motivation to read increased. As the enjoyment for reading began to spiral, so did their confidence levels and their risk-taking abilities. The ability to read with more ease encouraged the students to volunteer more often to read orally. The students looked forward to sharing books with each other, their parents and their teachers. There was an increase in books taken from the school library, but most notable was the increase in books borrowed from the class library.

Writing activities were a routine part of the students' day. Improvements were noted in sentence structure and word usage. The students developed some fluency in expressing their thoughts and did not regard writing as a chore. Artifacts reflected enthusiasm, interest and anticipation.

Weaknesses observed prior to the treatment changed. There was a decrease in poor study skills habits, work habits, organization and immaturity. The amount of students needing structure declined, as did those who had problems with other children.

It is the recommendations of the researchers that the following interventions be retained in the program:

- Teacher read alouds
- Pair/share reading
- Cooperative grouping
- Writing activities
- Parent involvement reading

These interventions were successful and helped the students develop better reading skills.

The researchers determined that one aspect of the research that should be altered or not included is the district placement card. This student card did not supply enough specific information to determine the difference between at-risk and learning disabled students. As a result of the lack of specifics as to why the students were at-risk, students now believed to have learning disabilities were included in the research group. Two of the targeted group are presently receiving learning disability resource service, and three students are being considered for testing to determine exactly what their disability is. Possible disabilities could account for the students' lack of noticeable improvement in these students.

It is recommended that the student interest inventory be shortened and condensed. The focus should be on student attitudes toward reading and actual experiences with reading, and eliminate questions on extra activities. The questions about favorite television characters, games to play or favorite places to visit had no direct influence on the findings and should have been eliminated. Though the questions about naming a favorite book that had read and one that had been read to them were good, the answers were not reliable. The students simply couldn't remember "A" favorite. The possibility exists that some of the information reported by the students may not always have been accurate. Children often report what they think you want to hear.

The researchers also observed that inconsistencies existed in the reliability of the parent involved reading. Parents were not always truthful about their children's obligation to the weekly reading and signed the form even if the child had not done the reading. Evidence of this was witnessed in the confessions of the students who willingly admitted that they did not do the reading, but that the parent had signed the form anyway. The researchers would suggest that parent-involvement be adjusted to include occasional book reports or book reviews to be completed jointly by parent and child. Assigning precise nights for reading and furnishing the tally folder only on those nights may be more rigid, but providing a schedule could be more reliable than providing choices of when to read.

Finally, it is recommended that a silent reading time be incorporated into the action plan as a daily activity. The researchers did allow for some silent reading time, but did not include it in the intervention strategy.

The researchers from School A decided to continue the steps of the intervention for the remainder of the school year, despite the end of the study. Teacher read alouds, partnered reading, writing, and parent involvement have become a basic part of the

daily routine. The motivation to read is tremendous and the enthusiasm to pick a new book contagious. The researchers considered the positive results of the intervention substantial enough to implement this program in future years.

School B

It is the opinion of the researcher that the targeted students in sixth grade did show a small amount of improvement. It is the opinion of the researcher that even though the targeted students showed an average improvement of 14 percent, the interventions could not be considered as successful as anticipated. Comprehension in both silent and oral reading started out with 90 percent of the targeted students performing inadequately. These were the only areas that showed a 30 percent improvement. It was noted by the researcher that these particular students relied heavily on the pair/share and small group work activities to complete their work. They enjoyed working with a partner and stated often that it was "easier" to do their assignments. An increase in confidence and enthusiasm was observed in not even half of the students.

As was stated previously cooperative groups seemed to allow the targeted students to sit and observe the others working. By sixth grade the targeted students saw themselves as "slow" or "stupid" and allowed other students to dominate and do all of the work. Once we changed to smaller groups of two and sometimes three it was noted that a few started to participate more. The targeted students displayed such low self-esteem and by this age had already resigned themselves to being failures.

Lack of parental support was also identified early on in the intervention. The parents all expressed a willingness to help their child but only one out of the ten really followed through from October to February. It was also pointed out by three of the students that their parent or parents never signed their notebook. They had always signed their mom or dad's name so there was never a discrepancy in signatures.

The parental involvement and their home life played a definite part in the success of the intervention and a definite correlation could be seen by specific targeted students' low grades and poor attitudes. Unfortunately the researcher could not control the home situation but only ask for help and make suggestions.

It is the researcher's opinion that by sixth grade the targeted students were experiencing far more problems than the classroom teacher can deal with in a class of 33 students. Four of the targeted students started weekly counseling sessions with the school counselor with one being referred to an outside agency. These referrals were made due to failing report card grades and chronic behavioral problems in school. Two other students have since been referred for diagnostic evaluations to check for learning disabilities. Two other students were started on medication to control their hyperactivity in hopes of improving their grades and behaviors and one student was started on antidepressant medication during the intervention period. The targeted students' problems needed to be addressed at a much younger age before the poor attitudes, behaviors, and low self-esteem have been established.

On a positive note, the other 23 students in the classroom showed noticeable gains in the areas of voluntary reading and self-directed learning behavior. Due to the positive effect the activities had on the class as a whole, the recommended interventions will be continued for the remainder of the year. These interventions were successful in helping develop better attitudes towards reading for the entire classroom and will continue to be used as an important part of the language arts program in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A

(Affix label here)

Student Information Card K-5

School Year_____ Grade_____
Retention History __No __Yes If retained, at what grade level?_____
(Achievement test results will be forwarded with class list.)

Reading book for the beginning of SY_____ _____

Reading Level
__Low
__Average
__High

Math Group
__Low
__Average
__High
__Accelerated

Work Habits
__Hard Worker
__Average
__Does not apply himself

Deficit Areas (Check if applicable)
__Language Arts __Handwriting
__Spelling __Science Concepts
__Social Studies __Phonetic Skills

SPECIAL SERVICES RECEIVED
__Counseling __Speech / Language
__Chapter 1 __Bilingual (TPI)
__LD/BD Resource __Gifted Ed (GATE)
__Special Ed Instructional _____
__Psych on file __Watch list
__Health Problem _____

Please write any specific suggestions / comments on back of placement card

Appendix B

Areas of Weakness Survey

Dear Teachers,

Please indicate any areas of weakness, for the targeted student, by placing an X after each of concern.

Study Skills _____

Work Habits _____

Organization _____

Motivation _____

Needs Structure _____

Immature _____

Has problems with others _____

Student's Name _____

Appendix C

Interest Inventory (Primary Grade Level)

Name_____Grade____Teacher_____Date_____

1. What are the names of your favorite television programs?
2. What are some activities you like to do with your parents? Grandparents?
3. What do you like to do with your brother, sister or a friend?
4. Tell me about your favorite place to visit.
5. Tell me about your favorite book that someone has read to you.
6. Tell me about a favorite book that you have read yourself or might like to read.
7. Have you ever been to the public library?
8. Have you ever attended a story hour at the library?
9. Tell me about some of the books you have at home.
10. Do you like to read the comics in the Sunday paper? What is your favorite?
11. What is the name of your favorite comic character?
12. What is the name of your favorite television character?
13. What are the names of your favorite games to play?
14. What are some things you like or dislike about reading?
15. Does anyone read outloud to you at home? Who?
16. What are some things about reading that you think are important?

Reading Diagnosis Checklist

	Pre	Post	Word Analysis Abilities
1			Visual memory of words
2			Solving words by sounding
3			Sounds of blends, phonograms
4			Use of context clues
5			Remembering new words taught
			Oral Reading Abilities
1			Comprehension in oral reading
2			Word by word reading
3			Errors on easy words / sight words
4			Addition or omission of words
5			Repetition of words or phrases
6			Ignoring punctuation
7			Guesses at words
8			Word by w.ord reading
			Silent Reading and Recall
1			Low rate of speed
2			Comprehension in silent reading
3			Lip movements and whispering
4			Head movements
			Reading Interest and Effort
1			Attention and persistence
2			Voluntary reading
3			Self-directed work; workbooks
		+ / -	+ strength - weakness 0 not observable

Appendix E

Student Name & Info

STUDENT INFORMATION CARD

Grade:_____Birth date:_____
Retained in Grade_____
Teacher: (Team)_____
Subject Area Average Grades:
___Science ___Social Studies
___Language Arts
(Check Indicates Weakness)
___Spelling ___Penmanship
___Written Composition
___Oral Expression
___Reading/Literature
Circle Level: High Average Low
___Mathematics
Current Level: _____
___6 grade MacMillan
___Transition Part 1
___Transition Part 2
___Transition Part 1 & 2
___Algebra
___Algebra/Geometry
Needs Skill Remediation: Y or N
(Write specific suggestions/comments on back)

Social Skills:
(Check Indicates Weakness)
___Needs Structure
___Immature
___Problems with Others
___Works Well with / Separate from
_____

Check Special Services for Current Year
___L / D Resource
___Chapter 1
___Self-contained Classroom
___Counseling / Social Work
___Speech Therapy
___R.E.I.
___G.A.T.E.

(Check Indicates Weakness)
___Study Skills
___Work Habits
___Organization
___Motivation

Appendix F

Interest Inventory (Intermediate Grade Level)

NAME_____GRADE____TEACHER_____DATE_____

1. What are the names of your favorite television programs?

2. What television sports programs are your favorites?

3. Do you make collections of things? What are they?

4. What clubs or organizations do you belong to?

5. What school subjects do you like?

6. What school subjects are of least interest to you?

7. What books have you read in the last two months?

8. Tell me about the most interesting book you ever read?

9. What magazines do you get at home?

10. Do you read the newspaper? Which parts of the paper do you read?

11. Do you go to the library? Do you have a card?

12. Do you read outloud to anyone?

13. What types of books do you like best?

travel	sports	mystery
science	adventure	biographies

14. Does anyone help you discover and select books that you might enjoy? Who?

15. What are some things about reading that you think are important?

Reading Diagnosis Checklist II

	Pre	Post	Word Analysis Abilities
1			Solving words by sounding syllables
2			Use on context skills
3			Remembering new words taught
4			Dictionary skills: Location, pronunciation, meaning
			Oral Reading Abilities
1			Comprehension in oral reading
2			Incorrect phrasing; ignores punctuation
3			Errors on easy words
4			Expression in reading
5			Addition or omission of words
6			Repetition of words or phrases
7			Speed of reading
			Silent Reading and Recall
1			Comprehension in silent reading
2			Whispering and lip movements
3			Poor recall on questions
4			Attention and persistence
5			Unaided written recall
6			Skimming and locating information
			Reading Interest and Effort
1			Voluntary reading
2			Self-directed
			+ Adequate --Needs Improvement

Appendix H

Dear Parents,

As part of our effort to improve reading skills and comprehension, we are asking that the students participate in a home reading activity.

Each student will be expected to read with an adult for 15 minutes, twice a week. The student can read orally to the adult OR the adult can read orally to the student. Reading materials can be anything that the reading pair selects.

Please sign the record sheet each time the oral reading is completed. The sheet will be collected on Friday mornings to check that the reading was done.

Your cooperation is very important. Reading skills are improved by reading. Let's join together and read!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Egan

Mrs. O'Sullivan

Appendix I

DATE	BOOK TITLE	PARENT SIGNATURE
Week of October		
30		
30		
Week of November		
06		
06		
13		
13		
20		
20		
27		
27		
Week of December		
04		
04		

DATE	BOOK TITLE	PARENT SIGNATURE
Week of December		
11		
11		
18		
18		
25		
25		
Week of January		
01		
01		
08		
08		
15		
15		

DATE	BOOK TITLE	PARENT SIGNATURE
Week of January		
22		
22		
29		
29		
Week of February		
05		
05		
12		
12		
19		
19		
26		
26		

DATE	BOOK TITLE	PARENT SIGNATURE
Week of March		
04		
04		
11		
11		
18		
18		
25		
25		
Week of April		
01		
01		
08		
08		

Appendix J

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Appendix K

November 13, 1995

Dear Parents,

As part of our effort to improve reading skills and comprehension, we are asking that the students participate in a home reading assignment.

Each student will be expected to read with an adult for 15 minutes, five times a week. The student can read orally to the adult or the adult can read to the student. Alternating paragraphs is a good idea for those students who really struggle with comprehension. This would be a good time for the students to read their Accelerated Reader books. They are required to accumulate 3 points each month on the tests they take. Reading over homework again is also recommended.

Please mark in their assignment books each day that your child reads. Assignment notebooks will be checked each Friday. Your cooperation is important to the success of this activity. If this activity poses a problem for you or you do not wish to participate, please send me a note and I will not require your child to participate. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 532-8540 (Prairie View Jr. High).

Sincerely,

Mrs. Wator

Appendix L

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